



Are our listed buildings safe?

Appleyard House is an imposing building in Brighton Road facing Elm Grove. Originally built as a hotel to serve a new Horsham railway station on a line from London to Brighton via Dorking and Shoreham, it was left high and dry when the line took a different route. It was designated as a Grade II Listed Building in 1974.

Readers may recall the news earlier this year that, after many years use as offices, Appleyard House had been delisted by Historic England and was to be converted into a church.

The building had been acquired by the Denne Road Gospel Church and they had applied for listed building consent to make internal changes. This was refused and, instead of appealing that decision, the Church successfully applied to Historic England for delisting. This was granted on the grounds that unauthorised alterations by previous owners (not the Gospel Church) meant that there was no longer sufficient special interest to meet the criteria for a building to be Listed.

The Horsham Society was very



Appleyard House

concerned at the approach taken by Historic England. Responsible owners of Listed Buildings often incur extra costs in maintenance and are constrained in the changes they can make. It is the price owners pay for the honour of being the temporary custodian of a piece of our national heritage, and one in which many take justifiable pride. So, in our view a

system that reassessed a Listed Building that had had unapproved alterations against the same criteria as if it were for a new listing had the potential to reward people for breaking the law. In our view, in such circumstances Historic England should instead seek to protect what is left, particularly in a case such as Appleyard House where the façade – which is all most people see – was to all appearances intact.

When we raised our concerns with Historic England they told us in so many words that their approach was right and that the integrity of the List had to be maintained.

We asked Jeremy Quin MP for help and he wrote twice to Historic England on our behalf. While not conceding that their approach to delisting was wrong, their Chief Executive confessed to sharing our frustration that there is a potential profit to be made through damaging the heritage in a planning system that allows unauthorised works to go unchecked. He said that although the tools exist to take action there is a lack of resources in local authorities, particularly specialist heritage and enforcement staff. In 2018

Historic England plan to put further effort into highlighting current enforcement powers to local authorities and encouraging them to use them.

This is commendable but the problem with unapproved internal alterations is that it may be many years before they come to light. However, Historic England said that conveyancing solicitors who fail to identify unauthorised work to listed property risk future action by their clients. This suggests to us that authorities such as HDC should adopt a more robust approach to prosecution when cases are identified.

With internal renovations completed, worshippers from the Gospel Hall recently moved in to Appleyard House which has been renamed Appleyards Bible Church.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 259038.